

Why Culture is Important to Environmental Behavior

Michael Paolisso

Department of Anthropology
STAC Social Science Workshop
March 10, 2011

Culture and Behavior: A View from Environmental Anthropology

- Widely accepted that culture influences (environmental) behavior, generally
- How so and to what extent has been a major research priority within anthropology, with:
 - Culture as community environmental beliefs and values (traditional, scientific and management ecological knowledge)
 - Culture as a knowledge framework linked to vulnerability, adaptation and resilience
 - Culture as cognitive framework

Culture as Shared Cognition

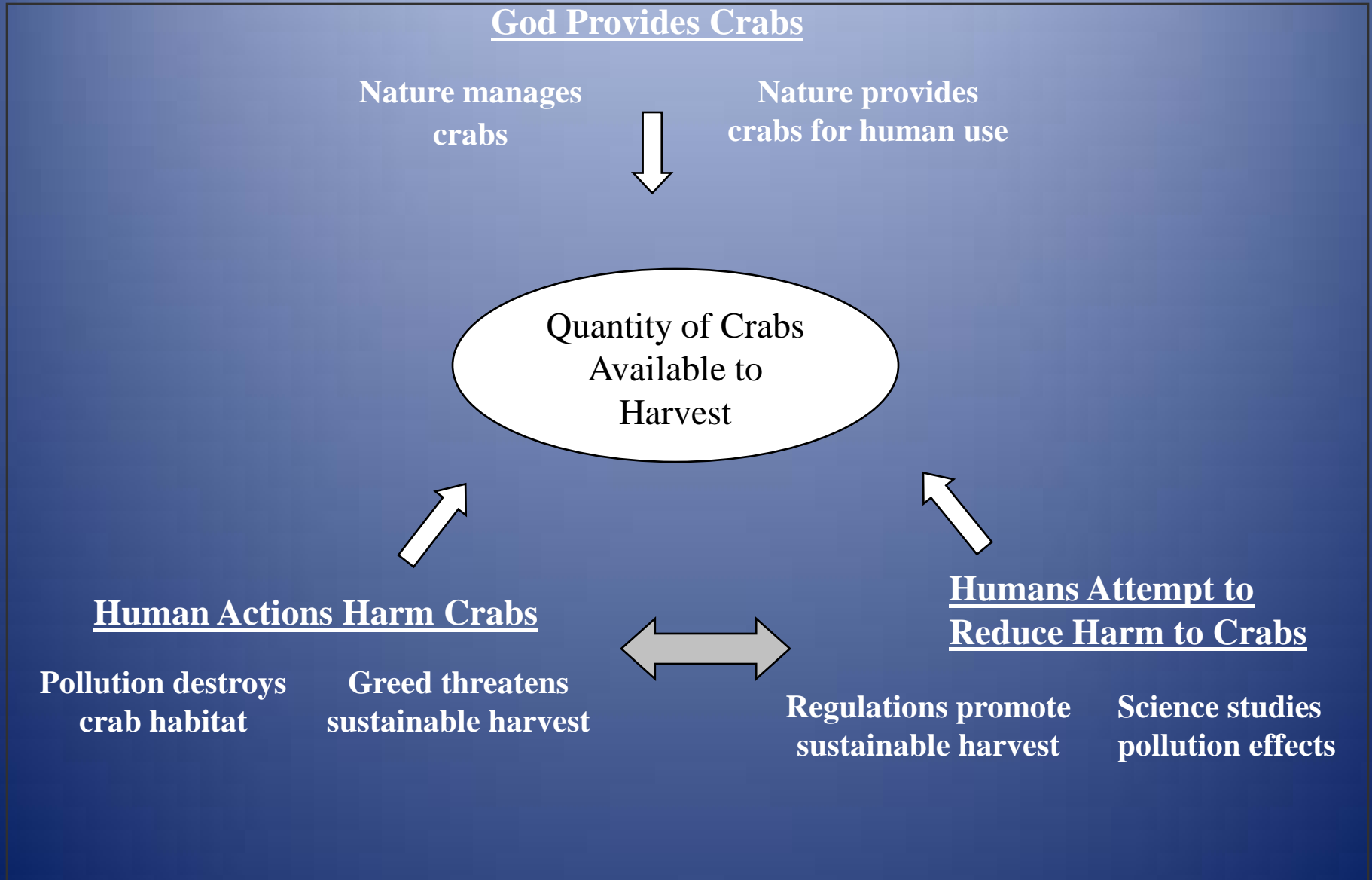
- Culture: “whatever it is one has to know or believe to operate in a manner acceptable to its members.”
- We all have this “culture” in our heads;
- If we share this culture, then we recognize that we belong to the same group;
- This culture is very implicit;
- Influences how we view and value environment.



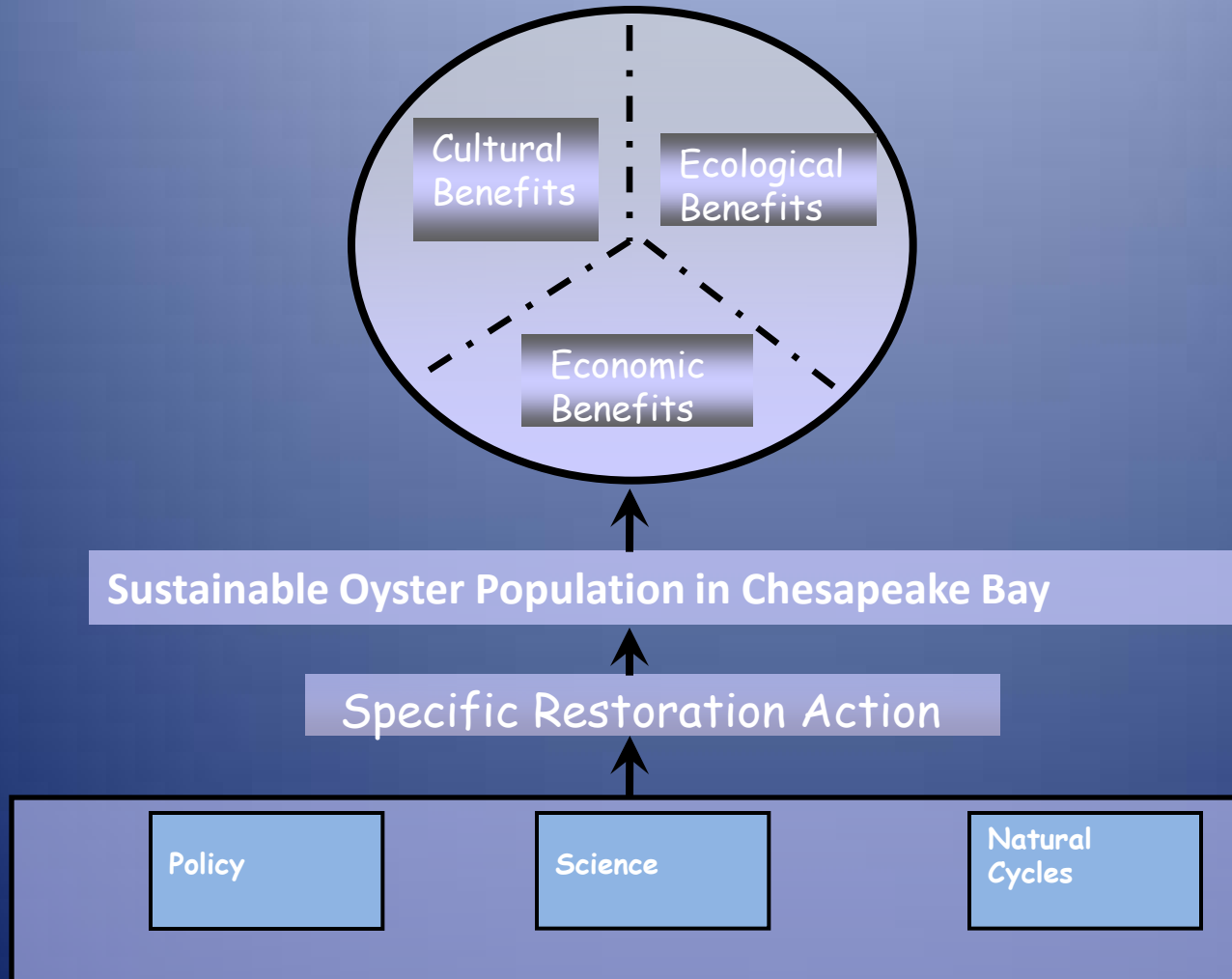
Cultural Models

- Presupposed, tacit, taken-for-granted knowledge models
- Store cognitively: culture in the mind
- Created by experiences over time and change
- In new or uncertain (environmental) situations, reasoning draws heavily on cultural models.
- Made up of interconnected schemas
- Not questioned

Watermen's Cultural Model of Blue Crab Fishery



Cultural Model: Oyster Restoration for Multiple Goals



Culture, Cognition and Environmental Behavior

- Implicit cultural knowledge is linked to behavior through emotions and core values (Prius versus Hummer)
- Provides reasoning and rationale for behavior (not necessarily right or wrong)
- Behavior as experience leads to new cultural models if sustained and shared (e.g. Collaborative learning)
- When mutually reinforcing, culture and behavior become core and identifying (policy relevant)

Chesapeake Bay Environmentalisms and Bay Management

- Culture creates multiple environmentalisms (more in the future)
- Bay resource management is understood through multiple cultural/cognitive environmental models (map these models)
- Beyond communication of science and management goals
- Cultural knowledge leads to collaborative learning and partnerships
- Great Bay advantage: a shared goal to protect and manage Bay's natural resources